

COMMON-TONE DIMINISHED SEVENTH CHORDS

The common-tone diminished seventh chord is a chromatic non-functional chord that serves to expand another chord. Because it generally appears as a collection of neighbor tones, the common-tone diminished seventh is often described as a “neighbor chord.” The outer voices are especially likely to move by step or common tone; leaps (if necessary) are usually relegated to an inner voice.

As its name suggests, the common-tone diminished seventh chord has a fully diminished quality and shares one note with the chord it prolongs. This common tone is the root of the prolonged chord. Since the common-tone diminished seventh chord has no function of its own, it is not given its own Roman numeral but instead is simply abbreviated $CT^{\circ 7}$.

a. preferred b. acceptable c. poor soprano d. poor spelling

B \flat : I $CT^{\circ 7}$ I I $CT^{\circ 7}$ I I $CT^{\circ 7}$ I I $CT^{\circ 7}$ I

Notice that the smoothest voice-leading will result in a doubled fifth (*a*); this is generally considered preferable to leaping, although minimal leaping is acceptable as long as it is hidden in an inner voice (*b*). Leaping in either of the outer voices is undesirable (*c*). The common-tone diminished seventh chord’s spelling should be determined by the voice-leading tendencies of the notes involved: examples *a-c* are spelled appropriately, but *d* is not. Notice that when the expanded chord is in root position, the $CT^{\circ 7}$ will appear to be in $\frac{4}{2}$ position.

e. f. g. h.

D: I⁶ $CT^{\circ 7}$ I⁶ V $CT^{\circ 7}$ V V⁷ $CT^{\circ 7}$ V⁷ V⁶ $CT^{\circ 7}$ V⁶₅

Although common-tone diminished sevenths are frequently used to expand root-position chords, they also expand inverted chords quite effectively (*e* and *h*). Notice that the common tone is far less conspicuous in these cases, often relegated to an inner voice (*h*). The common-tone diminished seventh chord almost invariably expands a major chord, most likely the tonic (*a-e*) or the dominant (*f-h*). The expanded dominant may be either a triad (*f*) or a seventh chord (*g*), and sometimes the seventh is added after the $CT^{\circ 7}$ (*h*).

